Department of State

TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 01 SAIGON 02972 01 OF 02 121512Z

41
ACTION SS-25

INFO SSO-00 NSCE-00 CCO-00 /025 W

P 121420Z AUG 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4496

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CMR
REVIEWED BY Joan Izenberg DATE 10/6/81
RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED ☑ RELEASABLE ☑
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 2972

EXDIS

1. THIS TELEGRAM WILL SUPPLEMENT SAIGON 2869 IN SUMMARIZING OUR VIEW OF ELECTION TO DATE INSOFAR AS CHARGES AGAINST THE GVN AND THIEU-KY TICKET ARE CONCERNED. IT MAY BE USEFUL IN ANSWERING CRITICISM IN THE U.S. IN SUMM, WE BELIEVE THAT SINCE KY-THIEU MERGER, ELECTIONS HAVE PROCEEDED FREELY AND FAIRLY GAUGED BY THE STANDARD OF U.S. ELECTIONS, WHICH IS A VERY TOUGH STANDARD TO APPLY TO A NATION WITHOUT A DEMOCRATIC TRADITION, WITH LIMITED ADMINISTRATIVE CAPABILITY, WITH AN INSECURE COUNTRYSIDE, AND IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR.

2. CLAIMS OF UNFAIRNESS STEM PRIMARILY (A) FROM RUMORS,

PAGE 2 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
MISQUOTES, ACCEPTANCE OF OPPOSITION CANDIDATE STATEMENTS WHICH EVEN IN U.S. WOULD BE MADE TO SERVE THEIR OWN INTERESTS, AND NEWS STORIES BASED ON RUMOR AND NOT ON HARD FACTS; AND (B) A TENDENCY TO GAUGE THE FAIRNESS OF THE ELECTIONS AGAINST THE STANDARD OF PERFECTION, WHICH DOES NOT PREVAIL EVEN IN THE UNITED STATES, AND WHICH CANNOT REASONABLY BE EXPECTED ANYWHERE, PARTICULARLY IN A NATION AT WAR AND WITHOUT DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS.

3. THE GVN HAS DONE THE FOLLOWING THINGS TO INSURE FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS:

SECRET

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 02 SAIGON 02972 01 OF 02 111512Z

A. PRESS CENSORSHIP HAS BEEN LIFTED AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS CLEARLY BEING CARRIED OUT.
B. GENERAL VIEN, DEFENSE MINISTER AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF VIETNAMESE ARM
ED FORCES, PUBLICLY STATED THAT ARMED FORCES WOULD NOT HAVE A CANDIDATE, WOULD STAY OUT OF ELECTIONS, AND THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WOULD NOT ELECTIONEER AND WOULD VOTE AS INDIVIDUALS. IN ADDITION HE SENT WRTTEN DIRECTIVE TO ARMED FORCES COMMANDERS, CLEARLY STATING RULES GOVERNING PARTICIPATION BY MILITARY

PAGE 3 RUMJIR 972 S E C R E T
PERSONNEL IN ELECTION ACTIVITY.
C. GENERAL THANG, MINISTER OF REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT, AT GRADUATION EXERCISE AT VUNG TAU SCHOOL, STATED THAT NO RD WORKERS WOULD ENGAGE IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND EACH WOULD VOTE AS AN INDIVIDUAL.
D. GENERALS KY AND THIEU CALLED PROVINCE AND DISTRICT LEADERS INTO TOWN AND TOLD THEM THEY SHOULD NOT PRESSURE POPULACE TO VOTE FOR ANY PARTICULAR CANDIDATE. THEY WERE NOT TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS. THE ELECTION LAW PROVIDES FOR STIFF PENALTIES FOR CIVIL SERVANTS WHO ENGAGE IN ELECTION FRAUD AND THESE PENALTIES HAVE BEEN PUBLICIZED.
E. GENERAL LOAN WAS RELEIVED AS CHIEF OF MILITARY SECURITY, ALTHOUGH HE STILL REMAINS AS CHIEF OF NATIONAL POLICE. HE HAS BEEN TOLD TO STAY OUT OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN BY KY, AND SO FAR AS WE HAVE EVIDENCE, HE IS DOING SO.
F. ALL CANDIDATES ARE BEING GIVEN MONEY TO CAMPAIGN BY GVN, PURSUANT TO THE ELECTION LAW. THE GOVERNMENT IN PRINTING THEIR POSTERS AND LEAFLETS FREE OF CHARGE.
G. ALL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE BEING FURNISHED TRANSPORTATION BY GVN, A BENEFIT NOT REQUIRED BY THE LAW.

PAGE 4 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
H. ALL CANDIDATES ARE BEING GIVEN FREE TIME ON GOVERNMENT RADIO AND TELEVISION.
I. IVITATIONS HAVE BEEN EXTENDED BY THE GVN FOR

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 03 SAIGON 02972 01 OF 02 111512Z

OBSERVERS TO COME FOR THE ELECTIONS TO (1) THE UN, (2) GOVERNMENTS HAVING RELATIONS WITH THE GVN, (3) SEVERAL PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS, AND (4) THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS.
J. THERE ARE A VARIETY OF SAFEGUARDS PROVIDED IN THE ELECTORAL LAW SUCH AS POLL WATCHERS (SEE OUR A-773 OF JUNE 22, 1967) AND ELABORATE PROVISIONS FOR MONITORING THE ELECTIONS BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

4. COMPLAINTS ABOUT THREAT TO "FREE" ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN:
A. GENERAL KY'S SUPPOSED STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD PULL A COUP IF CIVILIAN CANDIDATES WIN. GENERAL KY HAS PUBLICLY AND CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT HE MADE THIS STATEMENT, CLAIMS HE WAS MISQUOTED, SAYS HE WILL SUPPORT A NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT.
B. THE DONG HA INCIDENT. THIS IS EXPLAINED IN SAIGON 2869. IT IS INTERESTING TO OBSERVE THAT (1) ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CAMPAIGN ARE A RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

PAGE 5 TUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
COMMITTEE, WHICH IS COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVE SELECTED BY THE CANDIDATES THEMSELVES; (2) THE ELECTION LAW REQUIRES ONLY THAT THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE "ORGANIZE TALKS BETWEEN ELECTORS AND THEIR CANDIDATES" BUT DOES NOT SPECIFY PROVIDING PARTICULAR FACILITIES; (3) IN THIS CASE THE GVN HAD LUNCH FOR THE CANDIDATES SET UP, ROUNDED UP A CROWD TO HEAR THEM, AND MADE ARREANGEMENTS APART FROMPRANSPORTATION, NONE OF WHICH WAS REQUIRED BY THE LAW, AND ALL OF WHICH IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE HANDLED BY EACH CANDIDATE'S OWN CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION AS HIS WON RESPONSIBILITY; AND (4) GENERALS THIEU AND KY HAVE INDICATED THEIR DESIRE TO DO ANYTHING WITHIN REASON TO SEE THAT THE CAMPAIGN ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE SMOOTHLY MADE IN THE FUTURE.
C. TURN DOWN OF BIG MINH AND AU TRUONG THANH AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. REGARDLESS OF HOW WE MIGHT HAVE DECIDED THE QUESTION (1) THE ACTION WAS TAKEN BY THE ELECTED ASSEMBLY, NOT THIEU OR KY; (2) THE BASIS FOR ELIMINATION OF BOTH CANDIDATES WAS VIOLATION OF LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, WHETHER WE THINK THE REQUIREMENTS WERE PROPERLY INTERPRETED OR NOT; (3) MINH AND THANH WERE NOT "SINGLED OUT," AS SEVERAL

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 04 SAIGON 02972 01 OF 02 111512Z

PAGE 6 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
OTHER CANDIDATES WERE ALSO ELIMINATED (4) THE "FRENCH CITIZENSHIP"
CAUSE OF BIG MINH'S ELIMINATION (HIS VP CANDIDATE'S CITIZENSHIP)
WAS ALSO USED TO ELIMINATED ANOTHER CANDIDATE, TRAN VAN THOAN;
AND (5) ELEVEN CANDIDATES REMAINED IN THE RACE, GIVING
THE PEOPLE AN ADEQUATE CHOICE. IN THE UNITED STATES CANDIDATES
ARE ALSO SOMETIMES ELIMINATED FROM THE RACE FOR VARIOUS LEGAL
REASONS SUCH AS AGE, RESIDENCE REQUIREMENTS, CONVICTION OF
FELONY, HOLDING OF OTHER OFFICE, ETC., VARYING FROM STATE TO
STATE. THERE IS ALSO A " PEACE CANDIDATE" NOW, DZU SO THE
VOTERS ARE NOT DENIED THIS CHOICE BY ELIMINATION OF THANH.
D. GENERAL LOAN'S APPEARANCE IN THE BALCONY OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT THE TIME OF THE VOTE ON THE THIEU-KY
SLATE. THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AS PRESSURE BY SOME
OF THE DELEGATES, AND MAY HAVE INFLUENCED THEIR VOTES. BUT
THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT LOAN USED ANY THREATS; THE PUBLIC
HAS A RIGHT TO APPEAR IN THE BALCONY, JUST AS IN THE UNITED STATES,
WHERE IT FREQUENTLY USES THIS RIGHT TO ATTEMPT TO
EXERT SILENT (OR EVEN SOMETIMES VOCAL) PRESSURE; AND LOAN
HAS NOT ENGAGED OPENLY IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES SINCE THAT
TIME SO FAR AS WE KNOW.

BUNKER

1967 AUG 12 PM 3 33

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Department of State ACTION COPY TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 01 SAIGON 02972 02 OF 02 111537Z

41
ACTION SS 25

INFO SSO 00,NSCE 00,CCO [illegible] 025 W

P 121458Z AUG 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4497

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 2972

EXDIS

E. RUMORS THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAD FORMED A COUNCIL THAT WOULD "RUN THE GOVERNMENT" NO MATTER WHO IS ELECTED. THE FORMATION OF ANY SUCH COUNCIL AND SUCH INTENT OF THE ARMED FORCES HAVE BEEN CATEGORICALLY DENIED BY THIEU AND KY, ALTHOUGH OF COURSE THE CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR A MILITARY COUNCIL TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ON MILITARY MATTERS.
F. FAILURE OF THIEU AND KY TO RESIGN THEIR POSITIONS TO RUN FOR OFFICE. SOME OF THE CANDIDATES (HUONG, FOR EXAMPLE) SAY THAY ARE NOT REQUIRED TO DO THIS BY LAW, BUT THAT ELECTIONS WOULD NOT BE "FAIR" UNLESS THEY DID BECAUSE THEY HAVE, AS INCUMBENTS, AN "UNFAIR" ADVANTAGE. ADMITTEDLY ALL

PAGE 2 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
INCUMBENTS HAVE A NATURAL ADVANTAGE, BUT (1) THEY DO NOT GIVE THIS UP IN THE UNITED STATES, (2) THE PRESIDENT AND THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES DO NOT RESIGN TO RUN FOR RE-ELECTION, AND (3) RESIGNATION MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS A FAILURE TO LIVE UP TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND, EVEN IF MANAGEABLE IN THIS CASE, COULD BE A BAD PRECEDENT FOR LATER TIMES WHEN THE INTERIM WAS NOT SO MANAGEABLE.
G. CLAIMS OF SURVEILLANCE AND PRESSURE BY POLICE AND ACTIVITIES OF PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS. THE SIGNIFICANT THING ABOUT THESE CLAIMS IS THAT (A) THEY ARE GREATLY REDUCED FROM THE CLAIMS EXISTING BEFORE THE THIEU - KY MERGER

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 02 SAIGON 02972 02 OF 02 111537Z

AND (B) COMPLAINING CANDIDATES HVE GENERALLY BEEN UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO CITE SPECIFIC INSTANCES, AND (C) ON A RECENT BOAT TRIP IN SADEC PROVINCE KY, WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THIS CHARGE BY REPORTERS, STOPPED AT THE NEAREST VILLAGE, ASKED IF ANYONE KNEW HIM (WHICH NO ONE DID), ASKED WHO THEY WERE GOING TO VOTE FOR (THEY HAD NOT DECIDED) AND ASKED IF ANYONE HAD PRESSURED THEM TO VOTE FOR ANY PARTICULAR CANDIDATES, AND THEY SAID "NO". THERE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE SOME INVOLVEMENT BY PUBLIC OFFICIALS. REGARDLESS OF DIRECTION OR LACK OF

PAGE 3 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
DIRECTION FROM THE TOP. WE EVEN HAVE EVIDENCE THAT SOME OFFICIALS WILL AT LEAST QUIETLY SUPPORT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES. BUT PUBLIC OFFICIALS BECOME INVOLVED IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNTIED STATES. AND IN THE ABSENCE OF INTIMIDATION, SOME INVOLVEMENT ON THE SIDE OF THE "INX"WOULD GENERALLY BE CONSDERED ONE OF THE ACCEPTED ADVANTAGES OF INCUMBENCY.

5. WE SHALL OF COURSE CONTINUE TO STRESS THE ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE OF FREE ELECTIONS AND THE EFFECT OF ANY APPEARANCE OF RIGGING ON THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC. AND OF COURSE WE WISH TO AVOID ALL THINGS THAT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS MARRING FREE ELECTIONS, WHETHER SUCH CONSTRUCTION IS JUSTIFIED OR NOT. NEVERT ELESS, IT IS UNREALISTIC TO BELIEVE THE OPPOSITION WILL BE SATISFIED. IT SEEMS TO US THAT OUR ATTITUDE IN RESPONSE TO THE PRESS SHOULD BE:
A. THE STANDARD FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS SHOULD BE REASONABLE AND NOT MORE RIGID THAN IN THE UNITED STATES. IF BALLOTS ARE FAIRLY CAST AND COUNTED, AND INTIMIDATION IS NOT USED. THE ELECTIONS CAN BE CONSIDERED FREE.
B. THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS ARE NOT A FOREGONE CONCLUSION

AGE 4 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
AND A RESULT THAT GIVES THIEU AND KY LESS THAN A SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY WILL BE ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE IN THE SITUATION HERE-- WHERE MANY PEOPLE VOTE FOR E GOVERNMENT AS PROTECTION-- THAT UNDUE PRESSURES WERE NOT EXERTED.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 03 SAIGON 02972 02 OF 02 111537Z

C. IN A COUNTRY SUCH AS THIS, WE CANNOT EXPECT GREAT ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY, PARTICULARLY ON SOMETHING SO NEW AS ELECTIONS. WE SHOULD NOT ASCRIBE EVERY MISTAKE TO MALICE, RATHER THAN TO INEFFICIENCY--ITS MORE PROBABLE CAUSE.

D. AN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT--GENERALLY IGNORED BY THE PRESS-- IS THE DIFFUSION OF POWER BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND A NEW LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, WHICH UNDER THE CONSTITUTION WILL HAVE EVEN GREATER POWER THAN THE U.S. CONGRESS. THE PRESENT CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY HAS SHOWN INDEPENDENCE. THE LARGE NUMBER OF CITIZENS RUNNING FOR THE SENATE (730 ORIGINALLY, NOW 480) SHOWS CONFIDENCE OF MANY PEOPLE THAT THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH WILL BE IMPORTANT.

6. WE RECOGNIZE OF COURSE THAT WE MUST CONTINUE TO WATCH THE ELECTIONS CLOSELY AND THAT THERE IS NO GUARANTEE AT THIS TIME

PAGE 5 RUMJIR 2972 S E C R E T
THAT SOME IMPROPER PRACTICES MAY NOT CROP UP. WE WILL KEEP THE CLOSEST SURVEILLANCES ON PRACTICES AND ENDEAVOR TO INSURE THAT THE ELECTIONS ARE FREE AND HONEST. BUNKER

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED